

2. Constantine VII, Caucasian openings and the road to Aleppo

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It is widely held that the destruction of the invading army of the *amir* of Melitene in 863 marked something of a turning-point in Byzantium's position *vis-à-vis* its eastern Muslim neighbours. In the words of Georg Ostrogorsky, 'the tide turned and there began the era of Byzantine attack in Asia, an offensive which opened slowly but which for the second half of the tenth century moved forwards with ever increasing celerity'.¹ And yet, as Ostrogorsky himself implies, substantial territorial gains were only made almost a century after the Battle of Bishop's Meadow, and this raises the question why 'the systematic advance ... on [Byzantium's] eastern frontiers'² took so long. It was only in the mid-920s that a series of initiatives which have been seen as beginning 'the epoch of conquest' was launched. According to one authority, the emperors, 'supported by the substantial resources of an extensive empire, were equipped to pursue, after 926, a project of reconquest of eastern Anatolia, of Cilicia and of northern Syria'; the prime target of the earliest offensives, Melitene, was taken over directly, in 934, and then, according to another scholar, 'Byzantium's eastward drive was resumed'.³

That a 'new spirit' of confidence⁴ infused the imperial élite in the mid-920s is undeniable. The oration celebrating the peace treaty with the Bulgarians of 927 shows clear awareness in court circles of the repercussions which security in the west will have on the empire's position in the east: 'all things are made new and sparkling ... Only the sons of Hagar

¹ G. Ostrogorsky, *A History of the Byzantine State* (Oxford, 1968), 227.

² Ostrogorsky, *Byzantine State*, 237.

³ *EF* IX, s.v. Sayf, 107 (Bianquis); J.D. Howard-Johnston, 'Crown Lands and the Defence of Imperial Authority in the Tenth and Eleventh Centuries', *ByzF* 21 (1995), 86; R. Jenkins, *Byzantium. The Imperial Centuries AD 610–1071* (London, 1966), 245.

⁴ S. Runciman, *The Emperor Romanus Lecapenus and His Reign* (repr. Cambridge, 1963), 135.

mourn and shall mourn, who are bereft of heart at the mere echo of our concord'.⁵ Yet while accepting that Byzantine decision-makers had many other calls on their time and resources besides those from the eastern approaches in the late ninth and early tenth centuries, one may legitimately question whether they had a clear-cut concept of 'systematic advance' in the first place, and also whether these conceived of the eastern borders as being susceptible to uniform treatment: they did, after all, sprawl for over 700 kilometres, taking in a variety of climates, creeds and forms of settlement. More fundamentally, one may wonder whether many persons in imperial circles had clearly formulated ambitions of – or positive interest in – widespread territorial expansion even in the later 920s. One should beware of reading back a consistent policy of territorial expansion on a broad front from the events of the later 950s and 960s, when massive armed forces were deployed, many strongholds and fortified population centres together with substantial tracts of land were subjugated, and arrangements for maintaining such acquisitions had perforce to be made.

This is not to rule out the existence of some sort of conscious 'policy' and sets of 'policy-options' at the imperial court. Nor is it to deny that a series of military initiatives was launched upon the decision of the central government from the mid-920s onwards, of a frequency, range and panache which had few precedents in the middle Byzantine era. But it is to question whether these campaigns amounted to much more than the safeguarding of Byzantium's eastern approaches and reducing the risk of further damaging incursions from the side of the Muslims. They were essentially reactive or pre-emptive, intended to take out troublesome thorns in the flesh such as Melitene and Theodosiupolis⁶, to break the power of particular *amirs* or communities and above all to bring about stability in the borderlands by means of, in effect, neutralization or demilitarization. There was not, I suggest, much imperial hunger for direct annexation of lands as such. Interest in acquisition of key strongholds or fortified towns was rather keener, but this was on a highly selective basis. It did not necessarily involve full-scale occupation by a wholly 'Roman' garrison or the maintenance of a linear frontier. By the same token, there was a greater predisposition towards loose hegemony and the forging of personal connections between the emperor and individual leaders and other notables in the border regions. From this perspective, the long-range strikes of Domestic of the Schools John Kourkouas (and earlier generals) far beyond the enemy's forward bases should be seen primarily

⁵ I. Dujčev, 'On the Treaty of 927 with the Bulgarians', *DOP* 32 (1978), 280–81. See also A.A. Vasiliev, *Byzance et les Arabes* II/1 (Brussels, 1968), 261.

⁶ On the importance of Melitene, see J.-Cl. Cheynet's chapter in this volume (Chapter 4).

as adjuncts to diplomacy, ways of 'showing the flag' and instilling in far-flung élites some respect for the emperor and for those other potentates apparently enjoying his favour. This is not to deny that, besides serving as ancillary to 'diplomatic' measures, such strikes could also perform a straightforwardly military function – humiliating or breaking the power of a persistently belligerent commander, or serving to distract an invading force and induce it to return to defend its own country, on the lines recommended in *Skirmishing*.⁷ But if stability and *de facto* neutralization were at a premium, tribute and revenues from lucrative centres of commerce and population were of more concern than extensive tracts of land.

Such a measured approach towards territorial annexation was not confined to eastern affairs. The quite limited size of middle Byzantine armed forces relative to the number of potential trouble spots is both a reflection and a cause of the basic cautiousness of the emperors' stance.⁸ Their caution reflected awareness of what the empire's resources and administration (for all the rhetoric of world leadership) could actually afford. But it also sprang from apprehensions about the proclivities of sizeable contingents of well-trained 'professional' soldiers, once raised. John Haldon has suggested that one reason why only modest numbers of full-time troops were stationed at Constantinople through the early and middle periods was fear of *coups d'état*. Episodes such as the mustering of soldiers not far from the capital to confront Symeon of Bulgaria in 913 and Domestic of the Schools Constantine Doukas's subsequent bid for the throne gave substance to such fears.⁹ I would suggest that similar apprehensions as to loyalties partly explain the dispersal of full-time troops in what were usually smallish units in the provinces, and that they had some bearing on general funding arrangements and tactics in the borderlands.¹⁰ This was a systemic problem, neither peculiar to any one border-zone nor necessarily the product of agglomerations of family groupings

⁷ *Skirmishing*, 20, ed. and tr. G. T. Dennis, *Three Byzantine Military Treatises*, CFHB 25 (Washington DC, 1985), 218–23.

⁸ The scale of locally and centrally maintained armed forces and the means of maintaining them are discussed by M. Whittow, *The Making of Orthodox Byzantium 600–1025* (London, 1996), 183–93; J. Haldon, 'Military Service, Military Lands and the Status of Soldiers: Current Problems and Interpretations', *DOP* 45 (1993), 13–20, 44–7 and n. 111, 66; J. Haldon, *Warfare, State and Society in the Byzantine World, 565–1204* (London, 1999), 78, 101–6 and n. 68 on 314, 115–28.

⁹ J. Haldon, 'Strategies of Defence, Problems of Security: the Garrisons of Constantinople in the Middle Byzantine Period', in G. Dagron and C. Mango, eds, *Constantinople and its Hinterland*, SPBS 3 (Aldershot, 1995), 149–52; Theoph. Cont., VI.2–3, 381–3; J. Shepard, 'Symeon of Bulgaria – Peacemaker', *Annuaire de l'Université de Sofia 'St. Kliment Ohridski', Centre de Recherches Slavo-Byzantines 'Ivan Dujčev'* 83/3 (1989) [1991], 20.

¹⁰ The underlying assumption of *Skirmishing* is that a commander must fend for himself,

in certain border regions. Military *coups* could be launched in and around Constantinople as well as from the borders. This fact of political life does much to explain why Bulgarian power, once orchestrated by a capable Christian ruler, so unnerved imperial decision-makers. In times of tension with Symeon, too many troops needed to be stationed too 'close to home', while senior commanders such as Constantine Doukas already had legitimate access to the Great Palace.

These considerations throw some light on the consistency as well as the vacillations in the line taken by successive regimes towards the eastern approaches during the first half of the tenth century. As to the nature of that line, three propositions and a paradox will be offered here. First, it was primarily to Armenian-born potentates and adventurers and to Caucasian strong-points that Byzantine statesmen looked for an improvement in their strategic position in the east, not to the lands beyond the Taurus Mountains or in the Middle Euphrates basin or Syria. And even there they were highly selective, focusing on the north-eastern borderlands of 'Iberia' (Georgia), the strongholds along the northern and southern branches of the Upper Euphrates and other river valleys running in a generally east-west direction, and on the castles and castle-holders straddling the mountainous region of Taron, between the existing borders and Lake Van. Much depended on gaining the active co-operation of local, nominally 'subordinate', notables. Second, the aim of these initiatives was essentially defensive, to halt the raids launched from Muslim foreposts and to bar access to Muslim raiders through gaining control of a few choke-points. The creation of themes such as Mesopotamia and Chozanon between the two branches of the Euphrates¹¹ and the offensives against bases such as Melitene were primarily means to the same end, rather than conceived as a curtain-raiser to further expansion. Third, while there were economic, religious and cultural attractions to prompt intervention in the Caucasian lands, the underlying reason for prioritiz-

without counting on rapid reinforcement: *Skirmishing*, 4: 156–9; 5: 160–1; 7: 162–3; 11: 182–3; 12: 186–7; 16: 202–3; 17: 204–9; 19: 214–15; 20: 218–19; J. Haldon and H. Kennedy, 'The Arab-Byzantine Frontier in the Eighth and Ninth Centuries: Military Organisation and Society in the Borderlands', *ZRVI* 19 (1980), 101–5; Whittow, *Orthodox Byzantium*, 178; Haldon, *Warfare*, 105, 112–15, 117. See also Cheynet's chapter in this volume.

¹¹ Constantine VII Porphyrogenitus, *De administrando imperio*, 50 [henceforth = *DAI*], ed. and trans. G. Moravcsik and R.J.H. Jenkins, CFHB 1 (Washington, 1967), 238–9; N. Oikonomides, *Les listes de préséance byzantines des IX et X siècles* (Paris, 1972), 247, line 11; 267, line 16; 349, 359 (commentary); N. Oikonomides, 'L'organisation de la frontière orientale de Byzance aux X^e–XI^e siècles et le Taktikon de l'Escorial', *Actes du XIV^e congrès international des études byzantines I* (Bucharest, 1974), 235–7, repr. in *Documents et études sur les institutions de Byzance (VII^e–XV^e s.)* (London, 1976), no. 24; J.D. Howard-Johnston, 'Byzantine Anzitenes', in S. Mitchell, ed., *Armies and Frontiers in Roman and Byzantine Anatolia*, BAR International Series 156 (Oxford, 1983), 240, 256–7.

ing them was a negative one: maximum gains of security, prestige and resources could be made by the emperor acting directly for himself, with minimal recourse to intermediaries or sizeable forces of Byzantine-raised and -salaried troops. Finally, the paradox: although ties were forged with potentates, and a number of key enemy attack-bases were acquired or dismantled, the most extensive actual gains of the mid-tenth century were made elsewhere, in Cilicia and the Middle Euphrates basin, and not in Caucasia. If the aforesaid three points were valid, this contrast would seem to be somewhat anomalous. I suggest that the explanation lies less in long-hatched plans for blanket expansion eastwards than in the persistent spirit of militancy shown by a particular border *amir*, Sayf ad-Daula. This prompted Constantine VII to marshal and train unprecedentedly large forces and send them on the road to Aleppo, the *amir*'s new-found power-base.

Of the three points, the first has been mooted by other scholars,¹² and to belabour it further may seem superfluous. But I do not think that the emperors' focus on Caucasia has been considered sufficiently in light of the other two propositions or that the selective nature of their interest has been elaborated upon. The fact that a great deal of the campaigning led by John Kourkouas in the later 920s and the 930s was carried out across the Armenian lands is well known, but it has not been linked with the intensity of the coverage that certain western and southern regions of Armenia receive in the *De administrando imperio* (henceforth *DAI*). Constantine begins the section devoted to them thus: 'it is right that you [i.e. his son Romanos II] should not be ignorant of the parts towards the rising sun, for what reason they became once more subject to the Romans, after they had first fallen away from their control'.¹³ One should first note that, judging by the scope of what follows, Constantine regards the 'parts' towards the east as consisting essentially of the Caucasian lands. There is no inkling that the other regions still under Muslim control further south were likewise to be regained. It is equally noteworthy that Constantine acknowledges a certain continuity of policy between himself and his predecessors in relation to the eastern parts, whereas he repudiates Romanos Lekapenos's policy towards northerners such as the Bulgarians.¹⁴ His indications that Leo VI and Romanos Lekapenos alike had taken an interest in a number of Armenian individuals, leading families and strategic points correspond fairly closely with the main thrust of

¹² Notably by Whittow, *Orthodox Byzantium*, 315–18. In territories further south, once wrested from Muslim *amirs* later in the tenth century, considerable recourse to local power structures, or at least to officials of local origin, is discernible; see C. Holmes' Chapter 3 in this volume.

¹³ *DAI*, 43: 188–9.

¹⁴ *DAI*, 13: 72–5.

Kourkouas's incursions of the later 920s and 930s: along the valleys of the northern and southern branches of the Upper Euphrates and the Upper Araxes towards power-bases such as Dvin and the strongholds round Lake Van.¹⁵

Above all, the sheer unusualness of the fact that Constantine purveys detailed, fairly accurate and up-to-date material on districts such as Taron and the environs of Lake Van needs to be taken into account. Admittedly, the treatment is not without its lacunae, and even on Taron there is a certain imbalance.¹⁶ But, as R.J.H. Jenkins noted, this material stands out as being more coherent and containing more details relevant to current affairs in the mid-tenth century than almost any other section.¹⁷ This should surely be connected with the fact that the four 'Caucasian chapters' – unlike any other section of the *DAI* – amount to a kind of 'programme' for future initiatives to be carried out when opportunities arose.¹⁸ The 'Caucasian chapters' all deal to a greater or lesser extent with the control of *kastra*, as being key to predominance in a region, an assumption shared by contemporary Armenian chronicles. This is made explicit by Constantine in the case of Artanuj: together with its hinterland, it 'is a key to Iberia and Abasgia and the Mischians'.¹⁹ *Kastra* did, of course, vary among themselves. Artanuj, reportedly possessing extensive suburbs 'like a provincial city' and yielding 'immense customs revenues' from its wide-ranging trading connections, was a different proposition from some of the smaller fortified towns in the vicinity of Lake Van that are the subject of chapter 44. And a few of the *kastra* coming into the emperor's sights lay well to the east, for example Dvin, long a symbol of Muslim hegemony over the Armenians.²⁰ But there seems to be a consistent pattern of selection at work: Constantine is particularly interested in places that are sources of disturbance, whether located in the western

¹⁵ Vasiliev, *Byzance et les Arabes* II/1, 261–4, 266–73.

¹⁶ J. Shepard, 'Imperial Information and Ignorance: a Discrepancy', *ByzSlav* 56 (1995), 110. See also P. Karlin-Hayter, 'Krikorios de Taron', *Actes du XIV congrès international des études byzantines* II (Bucharest, 1975), 345–7, 353.

¹⁷ *DAI*, 12 (general introduction); See also R.J.H. Jenkins, ed., *De administrando imperio*: II, *Commentary* (London, 1962), 3–5.

¹⁸ The distinctive characteristics of the 'Caucasian chapters' (43–6) are a principal ground for the view that the *DAI*'s preceding chapters (14–42) were originally compiled for a different kind of work, the hypothetical *Peri ethnon*: Jenkins, *DAI: Comm.*, 2–5 (Jenkins). See also K.N. Iuzbashian, *Armianskies gosudarstva epokhi Bagratidov i Vizantiia IX–XI vv.* (Moscow, 1988), 128, 130.

¹⁹ *DAI*, 46: 216–17. On Artanuj's position astride various trade routes, see H.A. Manandian, *The Trade and Cities of Armenia in Relation to Ancient World Trade*, trans. N.G. Garsoïan (Lisbon, 1965), 145–6. The significance of *kastra* is also highlighted by Cheynet's chapter in this volume.

²⁰ *Et*² II, 678–9 (Canard).

borderlands, such as Theodosiupolis, or further afield, around Lake Van.²¹ By the same token he describes in detail key positions from where imperial officials or co-operative local notables could survey and manipulate affairs to the empire's advantage. And he is interested in those strongholds which may block the passage of Muslim raiders, performing a role not unlike that of the *kleisourai* on the south-eastern approaches of the empire.²² Every one of the 'Caucasian chapters' presents a quasi-legal case for the emperor's rights to a particular stronghold or set of strongholds, invoking written records and recent events.

One might be inclined to dismiss the *DAI*'s accounts of the exchanges between emperors and local notables over their respective entitlements to such places as Theodosiupolis, the forts of Mastaton and Avnik (both near Theodosiupolis) and 'the country of Apoganem' in Taron as examples of Porphyrogennetan pedantry and lack of control of source material; likewise with its account of the squabbles of members of the leading family of Taron over 'the house of Barbaros' at Constantinople and other possessions.²³ But I suggest that a certain rationale underlies such detailed coverage. Even in western and southern Armenia, where some sort of expansion was being contemplated, annexation and direct rule were viewed as merely one possible option: hence Constantine's attention to particular families and individuals whose co-operation might be valuable. And if the active support of local dynasts was deemed indispensable to the expansion of imperial influence amongst the eastern approaches, it was all the more desirable that the emperor's actions should be construed as legal. Parading scruples about property rights and formal agreements would not, of course, necessarily convince those against whom the emperor was pressing a claim, but it burnished the empire's image as a haven of order and stability, 'a protective bastion against the enemies' in the (admittedly, self-serving) words of catholicos Yovhannes (John) Drasxanakertc'i.²⁴ The apparent punctiliousness about legal entitlement and written deeds was a means of reassuring local notables not directly involved in the disputes that their property and social positions were safe under the emperor's wing. Equally, as the 'Caucasian chapters' indicate, individual notables in key areas sometimes handed over voluntarily strongholds or their 'country' to the empire.²⁵ Seeing that

²¹ Vasiliev, *Byzance et les Arabes* II/1, 249, 284; *El²* II, s.v. Erzurum, 712 (Inalcik).

²² *DAI*, 50: 238–41; Oikonomides, 'L'organisation', 346–7; Haldon, *Warfare*, 79, 114.

²³ *DAI*, 45: 208–13; 43: 190–97.

²⁴ Yovhannes Drasxanakertc'i, *History of Armenia*, LIV.38, trans. K.H. Maksoudian (Atlanta, GA, 1987), 193. The Byzantines' invocation of a written testament when eventually annexing the kingdom of Ani in the eleventh century was noted by K.N. Iuzbashian, 'Skilitza o zakhvate aniysskogo tsarstva v 1045 g.', *VV* 40 (1979), 79–80, 85, 89–90.

²⁵ *DAI*, 43: 196–7; 46: 216–19.

this might be done peaceably, without much outlay of resources, the emperor had every reason to pose as the champion of deeds of gift and testaments.

If the *DAI*'s 'Caucasian chapters' imply the empire's reliance on the co-operation and sometimes the armed forces of the local élites, they also reveal the extent of the concessions needed to secure them. This is evident in Constantine's exposition of his ongoing dispute with the Iberians over their entitlement to Theodosiupolis. Although Theodosiupolis was of outstanding strategic significance and the target of direct attacks by the Byzantines – including a seven-month siege by Kourkouas – both Romanos Lekapenos and Constantine VII were apparently ready to contemplate its capture and occupation by locals, in this case the Iberian *kuropalates*, Ashot II Bagratid and certain members of his family. It is the legal tangle that the successive emperors' promises engendered that takes up much of chapter 45. Constantine discloses without comment that he had been willing to make even more sweeping concessions to Ashot than Romanos had been: Constantine had issued a chrysobull conceding that Ashot could hold 'in mastery and lordship' 'all the places of the Agarenes which both he and his nephew ... may be able by their own power to reduce'.²⁶ In the event the Byzantines managed to seize Theodosiupolis for themselves in 949²⁷ and Constantine is, through his explication in the *DAI*, laying down the line that Ashot has contributed nothing to its capture and thus has no right to invoke the terms of the chrysobull. But in so doing he lets slip how frequently recourse to local co-operation was made both at central and field-commander level. John Kourkouas, as Domestic of the Schools, reportedly handed over the newly captured *kastron* of Mastaton to Ashot's brother, the *magistros* Bagrat, after Bagrat had sworn 'a written oath that he would retain it and never give it up to the Saracens'.²⁸ The episode is cited as an instance of Iberian untrustworthiness – Bagrat promptly turned the *kastron* over to the Saracens – but it also suggests the importance of the local assistance which Kourkouas received. Bagrat had taken part in the campaign against Theodosiupolis and asked for the *kastron* when Kourkouas was on the point of withdrawing. It may well be that the offer was readily accepted because the Domestic of the Schools was ill provided to garrison the stronghold with troops of his own.

Such an interpretation of Kourkouas's decision is supported by the cautiousness and awareness of the conditional nature of local notables' backing which pervade the 'Caucasian chapters' of the *DAI*. They are

²⁶ *DAI*, 45: 210–11.

²⁷ Vasiliev, *Byzance et les Arabes* II/1, 318–19.

²⁸ *DAI*, 45: 212–13.

manifest in the tale of Romanos Lekapenos's acceptance of the offer of Ashot Kiskasis to hand over Artanuj and hasty despatch of a small élite corps to take possession of it. Not only did this draw the emperor into a dispute between Ashot and his son-in-law, Gurgén; it also united Gurgén with the cousins against whom he had been at odds in their indignation over Romanos's intervention.²⁹ They wrote, threatening to 'put off our state of submissiveness to your ... majesty and make common cause with the Saracens', since they would be obliged to mobilize not only to regain Artanuj but also 'against Romania itself'.³⁰ Romanos is depicted as being 'terrified' at the prospect of these notables joining forces with the Saracens, and at once backed down. Whether or not Constantine was trying to pin all the blame for the fiasco on Romanos, he does not belittle Romanos's fears as to the potential seriousness of a Georgian-Muslim alliance against the Byzantines. The likelihood of this materializing was clearly slighter around the time of writing than it had been in the 920s, when, probably, the bid for Artanuj was made. Even so, the episode is related as a kind of cautionary tale, warning how attempts at outright annexation, even at the invitation of some local notables, could be counter-productive. Similar considerations, a sense of the need to cater for the sensibilities and interests of the locals, inform Constantine's recommendations about Theodosiupolis. He has just demonstrated at length how the *kuropalates* Ashot has done nothing to deserve any of the strongholds recently regained there, and in 'strict justice' has no right to control on either side of the Upper Araxes. Constantine none-the-less recommends that the river be the dividing-line between what is directly 'beneath our imperial majesty' and the possessions of the Iberians. He invokes the opinion of John Kourkouas 'of blessed memory' but he also notes that the *kuropalates* himself had proposed the Araxes for the borderline.³¹ Here as elsewhere in the western Caucasian lands, he intimates, it was prudent to keep the locals happy, while taking care to retain the legal and moral 'high ground'.

In the light of successive emperors' care to maintain a patina of legality and need for at least some local co-operation, one might turn to the question of the emperors' recognition of the title of 'prince of princes' and of the title's significance after Ashot I Bagratuni of Armenia received the crown of a 'king' from the caliph during the 880s.³² But here it may suffice to note that different emperors responded to the opportunities presented by this concession of the caliphate in different ways, according to circum-

²⁹ DAI, 46: 219-20. On these individuals, see C. Toumanoff, *Studies in Christian Caucasian History* (Georgetown, 1963), 495-6.

³⁰ DAI, 46: 220-21.

³¹ DAI, 45: 212-13.

³² DAI: *Comm.*, 158-9 (Runciman); Iuzbashian, *Armianskie gosudarstva*, 67-71; A.E. Redgate, *The Armenians* (Oxford, 1998), 174-5.

stances. Imperial recognition of a prince as 'prince of princes', which could apparently be accompanied by despatch of a crown,³³ did not betoken plans for formal annexation. Bestowal or withdrawal of the title served rather as a bargaining chip,³⁴ and also as a quasi-legal device for claims to lordship over those who had not submitted to the emperor directly. The argument, as cited by Constantine VII regarding the Qaïsites of the Lake Van region, was that even if they were now refusing to pay the emperor tribute, their predecessors had been under the dominion of the 'prince of princes'; and 'since the prince of princes is the *doulos* of the emperor of the Romans ... , it is obvious that the fortified towns, townships and territories of which he is lord also belong to the emperor of the Romans'.³⁵

Mention of the Qaïsité *amirs* and Lake Van leads to our second main point: that the exceptional cases where some sort of 'expansion' was consistently sought prove the rule that earlier tenth-century emperors were governed primarily by considerations of the security of 'Romania' as it was. If Constantine VII's explanations as to why the forts and fortified towns around Van should come under imperial dominion sound convoluted, their very prolixity attests the importance attached to this particular area. In respect of certain *kastra* there – as of nowhere else on any front – he expressly recommends repossession in terms which seem to mean direct occupation rather than a form of indirect rule: 'the emperor should get [them] back, as they are his property'.³⁶ Constantine sketches in part of the background. The Qaïsité *amirs* in control of the *kastra* had been forced by Kourkouas's raids to pay tribute to the emperor from around 931, but the current head of the clan, 'Apelbart' (Abu'l-Ward) is not paying tribute for them to the emperor.³⁷ This development is connected with an episode not expressly mentioned by Constantine: in 940 Sayf ad-Daula made one – just conceivably two – incursions into the region and, beside the shore of Lake Van, exacted oaths of submission from leading Armenian princes, as well as from the Qaïsité *amirs*.³⁸ Sayf took over a

³³ Kirakos Gandzakets'i, *History of the Armenians*, trans. R. Bedrosian (New York, 1986), 72; H.C. Evans, 'Kings and Power Bases', in J.-P. Mahé, R.W. Thomson, eds., *From Byzantium to Iran. Armenian Studies in Honor of Nina Garsoïan* (Atlanta GA, 1997), 488.

³⁴ As, for example, when Romanos Lekapenos offered it to an unidentified potentate as an alternative to migration to Byzantium and command of the themes of his choice: J. Darrouzès, L.G. Westerink, *Théodore Daphnopolète. Correspondance* (Paris, 1978), 54–5.

³⁵ *DAI*, 44: 200–1. See A. Ter-Ghewondyan, *The Arab Emirates in Bagratid Armenia*, tr. N.G. Garsoïan (Lisbon, 1976), 79–81.

³⁶ *DAI*, 44: 204–5.

³⁷ M. Canard, *Histoire de la dynastie des Ha'mdanides de Jazîra et de Syrie* (Paris, 1953), 740–41; *DAI: Comm.*, 169 (Runciman); Ter-Ghewondyan, *Arab Emirates*, 82.

³⁸ Vasiliev, *Byzance et les Arabes* II/1, 285–8; *DAI: Comm.*, 169 (Runciman); Ter-Ghewondyan, *Arab Emirates*, 84–6; Whittow, *Orthodox Byzantium*, 319–20.

number of strongholds, including Bitlis, from *Amir Ahmad*.³⁹ Ahmad who, as lord of other fortresses such as Chliat and Arzes had been paying tribute to the emperor, was subsequently killed by Abu'l Ward and his fortresses came under Abu'l Ward's control. These *kastra* are singled out as suitable candidates for repossession by Constantine VII, writing a few years later. In other words, Constantine is reacting to recent setbacks, in which Byzantine arrangements for indirect rule and tribute-payments had unravelled and the long-term solution now appeared to be direct occupation of the forts. There is therefore no reason to doubt the rationale given for this course of action, an essentially defensive one: 'If the emperor holds these three *kastra*, Chliat, Arzes and Perkri, a Persian [i.e. Muslim] army cannot come out against Romania, since they are between Romania and Armenia and serve as a barrier'.⁴⁰

If Sayf ad-Daula's intervention in southern Armenia and its repercussions prompted Constantine's specific recommendations, a general fear of incursions from the central lands of the caliphate accounts for the standing interest in the Lake Van region that successive emperors showed. As Mark Whittow pointed out, there were few traversable passes north from the central lands and the most convenient of these, the Bitlis pass, lay not far from Lake Van.⁴¹ One may connect with this fact of geo-politics both the *DAI*'s objective of establishing a direct presence around Lake Van and its interest in the leading family of the intervening region, Taron. As the case of the Qaisite *amirs* suggests, direct occupation was a last resort, when looser tributary arrangements with local potentates seemed to have broken down. The store set by such arrangements is suggested by the *DAI*'s genealogies of the Qaisite clan and specifications as to which *amir* held which *kastron*, data presumably amassed over the years.⁴²

A somewhat different instance of a nodal point on the eastern approaches is that of Melitene. This fortified town lay at the hub of communications routes, not least the valley of the southern branch of the Upper Euphrates leading to Lake Van.⁴³ As a centre for Muslim raiders, it had long been a thorn in the flesh of Romania. So it is not surprising that Melitene was Romanos Lekapenos's first target once the pressure from

³⁹ Vasiliev, *Byzance et les Arabes* II/1, 287–8; Ter-Ghewondyan, *Arab Emirates*, 85; Whittow, *Orthodox Byzantium*, 319.

⁴⁰ *DAI*, 44: 204–5. On these and other strongholds in the Van region, see *DAI: Comm.*, 167–70 (Runciman); T.A. Sinclair, *Eastern Turkey. An Architectural and Archaeological Survey I* (London, 1987), 175–80, 200–202, 206–7, 264–8, 275–6, 279–81, map facing 326; T.A. Sinclair, 'The Site of Tigranocerta. II', *REArm* 26 (1996–7), 71 (map); 73, 79.

⁴¹ Whittow, *Orthodox Byzantium*, 200.

⁴² *DAI*, 44: 200–203.

⁴³ F. Hild and M. Restle, *Kappadokien*, TIB 2 (Vienna, 1981), 233–5; Sinclair, *Eastern Turkey* III (London, 1989), 1–5, 8–10, 35–42, map facing 150.

Symeon of Bulgaria eased. What has received less attention is the fact that here, too, direct rule and occupation do not seem to have been the emperor's first preference. Repeated devastation of Melitene's hinterland eventually induced the *amir*, Abu Hafs, to negotiate and he obtained a *logos*, presumably guaranteeing immunity from further attacks, from the emperor. He and fellow notables of the town were allowed to remain in power, so long as they rendered tribute and liaised with Byzantine forces. According to Theophanes Continuatus, they even took part in triumphs in Constantinople, 'leading Agarene prisoners-of-war, which was an astonishing and extraordinary sign of the godless Agarenes' misfortune'.⁴⁴ It was only after the death of Abu Hafs and the occupation of Melitene by the forces of one of the Hamdanid clan that Byzantium resumed its offensives. Eventually, in 934, the town surrendered and its citizens were offered the choice of converting to Christianity and keeping their property or of staying true to Islam and being forced to leave. The emperor was clearly interested in tapping the wealth of Melitene and its fertile surrounding plain and, according to Theophanes Continuatus, 'the emperor has caused many thousands [of pieces] of gold and silver to be paid in tribute (*dasmophoreisthai*) from there each year'.⁴⁵ But while the town was taken under the emperor's wing as a *kouratoreia*, Muslim *amirs* apparently continued to perform administrative functions there until at least 961, and only from the 970s is there unimpeachable evidence of a Byzantine *strategos* assigned to Melitene.⁴⁶ In fact, the town seems to have been partially depopulated and the double circuit of walls was razed to the ground, so that it became an open city. The demolition was later called 'an insensate counsel' by a Syriac writer⁴⁷ and so it might appear, were one to suppose that Melitene's capture was intended to preface systematic Byzantine advances southwards or eastwards from a strategic communications hub. But these actions made sense if the Byzantines had few ambitions to annex territory and were primarily intent on neutralizing centres that had served as bases for the most damaging raids. Imperial propaganda now celebrated Saracen humiliations and the extension of imperial borders, but high on the actual agenda for the empire's approaches south and south-west from Melitene were the less glamorous goals of order and security.

⁴⁴ Georgius Monachus Continuatus, in Theoph. Cont., 907; Theoph. Cont., VI.24, 416; Canard, *Ha'mdanides*, 734-5; Vasiliev, *Byzance et les Arabes* II/1, 267-8.

⁴⁵ Theoph. Cont., VI.24, 416-17; Howard-Johnston, 'Crown Lands', 86-93.

⁴⁶ Canard, *Ha'mdanides*, 772, 804 and n. 190; Oikonomides, *Listes*, 265, line 21; F. Tinnefeld, 'Die Stadt Melitene in ihrer späteren byzantinischen Epoche (934-1101)', *Actes du XIV congrès international des études byzantines* II (Bucharest, 1975), 436. On the role of tribute and the probable nature of the *kouratoreiai* at Melitene and elsewhere, see Holmes' chapter in this volume.

⁴⁷ Michael the Syrian, *Chronique*, ed. and trans. J.-B. Chabot, III (Paris, 1906), 123.

Our third main point concerns the attractions that might be held to have drawn Byzantium's rulers towards Caucasia as a suitable sphere for enhancing influence and establishing a presence, in preference to regions beyond the Taurus and Anti-Taurus ranges, during the first half of the tenth century. Several well-known phenomena might be adduced as positive grounds for such prioritization, including the migration of numerous Armenian individuals to Byzantium and the Armenian origin of significant numbers of army commanders and members of the ruling elite; the hopes of some Byzantine Church leaders for reunion with the Armenian Church; the economic vitality and size of population of Armenia's towns; and the signs of respect for the empire and its culture on the part of members of local elites in the Armenian lands.⁴⁸ Few of these attractions were to be found in the 'no-man's-land' of the Taurus ranges or in the *ribat* accommodating zealous if inexperienced *ghazis* that studded the Cilician plain beyond.⁴⁹ And it is undeniable that the aforementioned phenomena had a bearing on the emperors' interests. One might note, for example, the tracing of Basil I's ancestry back to the Arsacid dynasty in the *Life of Basil* overseen by Constantine VII;⁵⁰ the letter of catholicos Yovhannes Drasxanakertc'i to the young Constantine in which he asks for military intervention to halt the oppression of the Muslim 'wicked beasts' and 'rescue the inheritance which is yours', mooted the association of Yovhannes' own 'flock' with 'the universal flock of your reasonable sheep ... [to] pursue their lives under the aegis of Roman supremacy, just like the people of Italy and all of Asia';⁵¹ or the rather less celebrated letter preserved in the name of Gagik Artsruni, ruler of Vaspurakan, which floats the idea of union between the Chalcedonian and the non-Chalcedonian Churches.⁵² It is from the milieu of the Artsruni that we have some of the most spectacular

⁴⁸ I. Brousselle, 'L'intégration des Arméniens dans l'aristocratie byzantine au IX siècle', in H. Ahrweiler and N. Garsoïan, eds, *L'Arménie et Byzance*, BS 12 (Paris, 1996), 43–52; N.G. Garsoïan, 'The Problem of Armenian Integration into the Byzantine Empire', in H. Ahrweiler and A.E. Laiou, eds, *Studies on the Internal Diaspora of the Byzantine Empire* (Washington, DC, 1998), 53–124 esp. at 61–6, 73–8, 93–9; Redgate, *Armenians*, 223–5, 252–3.

⁴⁹ Constantine VII, *Three Treatises on Imperial Military Expeditions*, ed. and trans. J.F. Haldon, CFHB 28 (Vienna, 1990), 90–91, 126–7, 128–9, 130–31, 174 (commentary); Haldon, Kennedy, 'Arab-Byzantine Frontier', 83, 106–15; Haldon, *Warfare*, 77 and n. 22, 177–9, 277; C.E. Bosworth, 'The City of Tarsus and the Arab-Byzantine Frontiers in Early and Middle 'Abbasid Times', *Oriens* 33 (1992), 276, 281–6, repr. in *The Arabs, Byzantium and Iran. Studies in Early Islamic History and Culture* (Aldershot, 1996), XIV.

⁵⁰ Theoph. Cont., V.2–3, 212–16; Brousselle, 'L'intégration des Arméniens', 43–4; Garsoïan, 'Armenian Integration', 66, n. 59.

⁵¹ Drasxanakertc'i, *History*, LIV.56–7, 66, trans. Maksoudian, 195–6, 197; Whittow, *Orthodox Byzantium*, 219–20.

⁵² Maksoudian, 'Introduction', to Drasxanakertc'i, *History*, 23; Redgate, *Armenians*, 223.

evidence of familiarity with imperial ideology and iconography. The positioning of the scenes of the Baptism of Christ and the Transfiguration opposite the king's gallery in the church of the Holy Cross at Aghtamar seems to carry the same message as the almost contemporary mosaics opposite the emperor's gallery in St Sophia: that the ruler's authority came from God.⁵³ In the same milieu of the Artsruni in southern Armenia, albeit two generations later, at the end of the tenth century, Gregory Narekac'i enthused about the emperors' control of the elements and of land and sea. He described the empire as 'stretching in the likeness of the firmament ... across the vast surface of the entire earth'.⁵⁴ Kindred themes of the ruler as placed in charge of all God's creation appear in the decoration at Aghtamar and the celebrated bath-house of Leo the Wise.⁵⁵

The basic contrast – of a predominantly Christian subject-population in most of Caucasia as against the culture, society and economy of Cilicia and parts of Mesopotamia geared to incessant raiding – is probably the single most important reason for imperial prioritization of Caucasian affairs. However, direct appeals such as that of Yovhannes were exceptional, and the *DAI*'s cautionary tale about Artanuj suggests awareness of the unforeseeable and undesirable consequences that attempts at actual occupation might precipitate. A common stock of political culture did not necessarily make Armenian princes willing formally to subsume their political structures fully within the emperor's. Rather, ambitious leaders such as Gagik Artsruni looked to the *basileus*'s court for convenient symbols and iconography with which to legitimize and perpetuate the self-determination of their own regimes. They were declaring their own special affinity with Christ's kingdom at least as much as flaunting links with the emperor. Such ambitions would have posed an obstacle to outright imperial annexation. But if the emperor's aspirations fell short of substantial territorial expansion and aimed primarily at securing order on his eastern approaches, stances such as Gagik's were not necessarily unacceptable. Nominal imperial hegemony could be upheld through the grant of titles, gifts and payment of stipends, offsetting the cost to a potentate of any tribute exacted. The emperor did not need to take on the administration or direct defence of a whole district. In fact, the underlying attraction of Caucasia may well have been essentially negative, arising

⁵³ C. Jolivet-Lévy, 'Présence et figures du souverain à Sainte-Sophie de Constantinople et à l'église de la Sainte-Croix d'Aghtamar', in H. Maguire, ed., *Byzantine Court Culture from 829 to 1204* (Washington, DC, 1997), 236–7, 244–5; L. Jones, 'The Church of the Holy Cross and the Iconography of Kingship', *Gesta* 33 (1994), 108, 110, 113–15. For more detail see the chapter by L. Jones in this volume. (Chapter 14).

⁵⁴ J.-P. Mahé, 'Basile II et Byzance vus par Grigor Narekac'i', *TM* 11 (1991), 562, 563, 571–2.

⁵⁵ Jolivet-Lévy, 'Présence', 239–41, 243–4.

from the geo-political problems of the empire: the emperor's limited reserves of full-time military manpower and abiding apprehensions as to the loyalty of Roman forces trained for attack.

In other words, Caucasian affairs held out particular appeal for emperors because the local elites were not, for the most part, Muslim; even when they were, there was at least a possibility of forging 'diplomatic' ties and tributary relationships with them, as at Melitene and with the Qaïsīte *amirs* around Lake Van. Above all, the Caucasian theatre was singularly well suited for the practice of diplomacy. The emperor could largely handle matters for himself, doling out titles and money, forging personal relationships with leading notables and securing ties through marriages between them or their sons and ladies in his own court circle.⁵⁶ The emperor, with a minimum of intermediaries, could periodically engage them – and their military manpower – to carry out specific tasks on behalf of himself. Both Romanos and Constantine could contemplate the capture and occupation of so important a raiding base as Theodosiupolis by the Iberian *kuropalates*. If stability on the eastern approaches and the security of Romania proper rather than the annexation of further territories were the emperors' principal concerns, such reliance on various forms of local surrogates made good sense. It was compatible with aspirations towards indirect influence or even occupation at key strategic points, such as the *kastra* near Lake Van or along the valleys leading there. Moreover, outright occupation of a town could be achieved with only a modest-sized Roman force: that sent to take over Artanuj numbered only 300 men. In mountainous terrain a stronghold could easily close a pass and smallish garrisons were potentially highly cost-effective. Furthermore, it is unproven that the expeditionary forces which John Kourkouas repeatedly led into Caucasia and Mesopotamia to great acclaim⁵⁷ were on an unprecedented scale, qualitatively or quantitatively differing from those directed by Basil I and Leo VI to sack Muslim strongholds and ravage their hinterlands. After those expeditions, too, spoils and prisoners had been paraded and court-orations delivered in conscious evocation of ancient Roman triumphs. But, then too, attempts at gains more durable than the devastation and debilitation of enemy attack-bases and retribution for Muslim raids were far and few between.⁵⁸

⁵⁶ DAI. 43: 188–97; 44: 198–9; 45: 206–7; 46: 214–23; DAI: *Comm.*, 168; A. Carile, 'Il caucaso e l'impero bizantino (secoli VI–XI)', SSCIS 43.1 (Spoleto, 1996), 64–6; K. Yuzbashian, 'Les titres byzantins en Arménie', in Ahrweiler, Garsoïan, eds., *L'Arménie et Byzance*, 218–20.

⁵⁷ Theoph. Cont. VI.41, 426–7; Canard, *Ha'mdanides*, 731–53; Vasiliev, *Byzance et les Arabes* II/1, 257–73, 284, 295–6.

⁵⁸ Some of Basil I's expeditions seemingly aimed at permanent recovery of strongholds, but the focus was on troublesome bases, notably Melitene and Tarsus: Theoph. Cont. V.40,

This leads to our postulated paradox. Substantial territorial gains were made soon after work on compiling the *DAI* ceased, and in a quarter receiving short shrift from the imperial handbook, the south-eastern approaches.⁵⁹ To suppose that any paradox exists is to beg a question: might not the plugging of Muslim attack-routes across Armenia and taking out of Theodosiopolis have been preparatory to massive assaults across the Taurus? The major expeditions in 948–9 and the sacking of Hadat and Marash might be seen as the first steps in a new forward policy to conquer northern Syria. Lacking space for a full rebuttal, we will merely present an alternative reconstruction, turning on two sets of events. It was, I suggest, ‘events’ that precipitated a greater military build-up than had been attempted for a long time, a change in military tactics and the long-term occupation of enemy territory in the Middle Euphrates basin.

These two series of events were setbacks, in fact personal and political humiliations, for the emperor: the disastrous failure of the Cretan expedition of 949, rapidly followed by the incessant inroads into Asia Minor mounted by Sayf ad-Daula. In the opening years of his rule as senior emperor, Constantine staked his prestige on recovering Crete, thereby placing himself in the honourable if unsuccessful tradition of his father’s efforts in the eastern Mediterranean, while at the same time showing up the inertia of his detested predecessor, Romanos. Crete was, in fact, an especially ‘imperial’ concern. The continuing raids and acts of piracy in the Aegean which a Muslim-controlled Crete sanctioned impinged fairly directly on life in the capital: the island appeared its ‘all too near neighbour and standing foe’ to Liutprand, after his voyage to Constantinople in 949.⁶⁰ A nexus of diplomatic ties needed to be woven by the emperor in order to isolate the Cretans from other Muslims, and to secure Byzantium’s other fronts while its armed forces focused on Crete. Constantine’s diplomatic *démarches* in the later 940s were to a large extent aimed at forming these ties.⁶¹ At the same time, the corralling together of disparate units of troops, many of them theme-soldiers from across the empire, and arranging for their pay, equipment and transportation were

269–70; V.46–51, 277–87; Vasiliev, *Byzance et les Arabes* II/1, 44–8, 82–93, 99–103; Whitton, *Orthodox Byzantium*, 314 and n. 6; J. Shepard, ‘Emperors and expansionism: from Rome to Middle Byzantium’, in D. Abulafia and N. Berend, eds, *Frontier Societies in the Middle Ages* (Aldershot, 2001), forthcoming.

⁵⁹ Constantine, reviewing the newly instituted commands of the south-east, highlights the initiatives taken by more or less local, self-reliant figures such as Melias: *DAI*, 50: 238–41. Armenians led by Melias played a key role in the reduction of Melitene: Theoph. Cont. VI.24, 416; Vasiliev, *Byzance et les Arabes* II/1, 258, 267–9; G. Dédéyan, ‘Mleh le grand, stratège de Lykandos’, *REArm* 15 (1981), 73–102.

⁶⁰ Liutprand of Cremona, *Antapodosis*, I.11, in *Opera*, ed. J. Becker, MGH in usum schol. (Hanover and Leipzig, 1915), 9.

⁶¹ Vasiliev, *Byzance et les Arabes* II/1, 322–31.

acts of co-ordination which the emperor probably supervised himself. A list of units and supplies refers in passing to arrangements for certain transports, 'as God will guide the holy emperor'.⁶² A saint's *Life* confirms the personal, high-profile interest which Constantine took in the expedition.⁶³ The disastrous outcome – 'of which everyone knows'⁶⁴ – was thus politically damaging as well as humiliating for Constantine, in so far as the expedition had been intended to display his competence and enjoyment of divine favour.

The second series of events, Sayf ad-Daula's incursions, may be traced to motives not utterly dissimilar to the emperor's.⁶⁵ Sayf was a newcomer to Aleppo, lacking local connections and in need of spectacular gestures through which to legitimize his rule over the disparate inhabitants of the region. A particular problem was the influx into the settled zone on the edge of the north Syrian desert of large numbers of 'Arab, Bedouin tribesmen who regarded trading caravans and markets as fair game for raiding'.⁶⁶ Partly as a means of providing alternative employment for the Bedouin, partly to place himself at the head of a movement generally deemed admirable and legitimizing in the Islamic world, and partly out of sheer conviction, Sayf unleashed a series of large-scale raids into Byzantine territory from 950 onwards. Most of his warriors were lightly armed and he relied on speed and surprise, tactics that did not make for the capture of fortified towns or seriously threaten Byzantium's strategic position.⁶⁷ But they did serve to draw attention to Sayf as champion of a revitalized *jihad* and to humiliate the emperor, feats which the numerous poets and orators in Sayf's entourage proclaimed with *éclat*. Already during the expedition of 950 the most prolific of the poets, Mutanabbi, described Sayf as aiming for 'the emperor's life' and boasted that if the Byzantine commander-in-chief retreated, 'We will give him a *rendezvous* on the Bosphoros!'⁶⁸ Such bluster probably exaggerates Sayf's expecta-

⁶² Constantine VII, *De cerimoniis aulae byzantinae*, II.45, ed. I.I. Reiske, I (Bonn, 1829), 670.

⁶³ *Vita S. Pauli iunioris*, 28, ed. H. Delehay, in T. Wiegand, ed., *Der Latmos* (Milet, III/1) (Berlin, 1913), 122; Skylitzes, 245-6; Vasiliev, *Byzance et les Arabes* II/1, 340-41.

⁶⁴ *Vita S. Pauli*, 28, 122.

⁶⁵ Constantine's use of coins as legitimizing propaganda was noted by T.E. Gregory, 'The Political Program of Constantine Porphyrogenitus', *Actes du XVe congrès international des études byzantines* IV (Athens, 1980), 128-30. Sayf likewise emphasized his piety for political purposes on coin legends: R.J. Bikhazi, 'The Struggle for Syria and Mesopotamia (330-58/941-69) as reflected on Hamdanid and Ikhshidid Coins', *ANSMN* 28 (1983), 154-6, 159-63, 171-2.

⁶⁶ A.J. Cappel, 'The Byzantine Response to the 'Arab (10th to 11th Centuries)', *ByzF* 20 (1994), 116-18.

⁶⁷ The limitations of Sayf's resources were highlighted by H. Kennedy, *The Prophet and the Age of the Caliphates* (London, 1986), 279-80.

⁶⁸ Vasiliev, *Byzance et les Arabes* II/2 (Brussels, 1950), 307-8 (Mutanabbi). See, on technical

tions, but it does convey a renewed spirit of daredevilry and the desire to inflict spectacular losses. The damage which this and subsequent raids through the 950s inflicted became notorious in the capital, even if word of his insults only reached the ears of a select number of army commanders and courtiers at Constantinople.⁶⁹

Constantine VII responded to the challenge with measures for which there were abundant precedents in Byzantine tactics, diplomacy and political theatre. Sayf's armies were ambushed as they withdrew laden with plunder through the passes in the manner prescribed in *Skirmishing*. In fact, the tactics then used against Sayf by the Domestic of the Schools, Bardas Phokas, form the subject-matter of this treatise, which declares him a pastmaster of the kind of guerrilla warfare formerly needed to defend the south-eastern themes.⁷⁰ Byzantine armies were also sent on major retaliatory expeditions, to try to distract the enemy from *his* raids, for example an incursion as far as Nisibis in 952, when large numbers of prisoners were taken. And expeditions were sent to demolish the fortifications of the forward bases where warriors were marshalled before raids, for example Hadat and Marash (which had already been Byzantine targets in 948). The aim was not occupation, but rather to demilitarize them and make the marshalling of further expeditions against the empire more difficult. Byzantine engineers' dismantling of the fortifications of bases near the Anti-Taurus passes or on routes leading to the passes, and the fighting of battles against Muslim troops who tried to stop them or to carry out rebuilding work, were characteristic of the warfare with Sayf for several years.⁷¹

Constantine's other main response to Sayf ad-Daula's incursions took the form of diplomatic overtures. Embassy after embassy was despatched to propose truces and prisoner-exchanges of the sort that had been negotiated between Constantinople and Baghdad for generations. Constantine probably hoped to cool Sayf's martial ardour by treating with him as supreme protector of the Muslims in the borderlands, a role that had, before the exchange supervised by Sayf himself in 946, belonged to the Abbasid caliph. The poetic accounts of Sayf's reaction to the embassies – sending 'replies' in the form of his cavalry⁷² – are borne out by his actions.

aspects of one of the poems of Mutanabbi composed during this campaign, A. Hamori, *The Composition of Mutanabbi's Panegyrics to Sayf al-Dawla* (Leiden, 1992), 8–9, 25–6, 28, 47–8, and, on other poets in Sayf's circle, *EF* IX, 103–4 (Bianquis).

⁶⁹ Sayf's notoriety – unusual for a Muslim border *amir* – is suggested by the requests for prayers circulated among monastic houses by an imperial official, Sayf's expedition 'being now at the gates': J. Darrouzès, *Epistoliers byzantins du X siècle* (Paris, 1960), 146.

⁷⁰ *Skirmishing*, 148–9.

⁷¹ Vasiliev, *Byzance et les Arabes* II/1, 347, 352–6, 361.

⁷² Vasiliev, *Byzance et les Arabes* II/2, 336 (Mutanabbi).

Thus the Byzantine proposal of a prisoner-exchange in 953 was rebuffed and a Muslim expedition reached almost as far as Melitene. The counter-attack that Bardas Phokas led into Syria was intercepted and crushingly defeated: Bardas himself barely escaped capture and was dealt a wound on the forehead so severe 'that he was to carry around the thick scar for the rest of his life'.⁷³ This detail is furnished not by Sayf's broadcasters but by a Byzantine chronicle: the indignities which the emperor's generals and, in effect, the emperor himself were undergoing were patent, and enduring.

Constantine persisted with this combination of measures for several years. The counter-attacks that he mounted required sizeable numbers of troops who had to be maintained for lengthy periods on campaign, while losses, in the form of casualties and capture by the enemy, were heavy. It is from the mid-950s – and not, to my knowledge, earlier – that Arabic sources begin to remark not merely on the large size of the emperor's armies but also on the presence of heavily armed cavalry, *kataphrakts*, and the heterogeneity of the armies.⁷⁴ The enlisting of unprecedented numbers of foreigners and recruitment of larger numbers of Byzantine-born soldiers full-time had, I suggest, much to do with the phenomenon of Sayf ad-Daula. The facts that his political base in Aleppo, was set well back from the 'front line' and that he could draw on ample reserves of enthusiastic if lightly armed Bedouin made it necessary for the emperor to raise additional troops, too. The workers employed to dismantle enemy fortifications required protection during their labours and this involved deployment of infantrymen. It is probably no coincidence that texts on combined cavalry and infantry operations proliferate from the mid-tenth century. What seems to be the earliest text, the *Syntaxis armatorum quadrata*, datable to around the beginning of the 950s, prescribes very briefly the workings of a hollow square of infantry that acted as a mobile base for cavalry.⁷⁵ Subsequent texts are fuller and presuppose ample reserves of cavalry and infantry that will often be operating on enemy territory. The flurry of revisions and refinements of the hollow square, as also of wedge-shaped heavy cavalry formations, implies that they had only recently come into intensive use and that experimentation was still

⁷³ Skylitzes, 241.

⁷⁴ Some Arabic writings had long given inflated figures for Byzantine invading armies or for Byzantium's forces overall: Vasiliev, *Byzance et les Arabes* II/2, 8–9 (Tabari); Whittow, *Orthodox Byzantium*, 188–91; Haldon, *Warfare*, 102–03 and n. 68 on 314. But the detailed descriptions of large, heterogeneous Byzantine armies for the 950s are fuller, with the implication that such armies were an innovation: Vasiliev, *Byzance et les Arabes* II/2, 125 (Ibn Zafir); 161 (Ibn al-Atir); 243–4 (Dahabi); 331, 333–4, 338–9 (Mutanabbi); 364 (Abu Firas).

⁷⁵ E. McGeer, 'The *syntaxis armatorum quadrata*: a Tenth-Century Tactical Blueprint', *REB* 50 (1992), 221–3, 226–8; E. McGeer, *Sowing the Dragon's Teeth. Byzantine Warfare in the Tenth Century* (Washington, DC, 1995), 184, 258–9.

under way.⁷⁶ That major changes in tactics occurred during the 950s is declared by Theophanes Continuatus. Morale was raised and training improved, so that soldiers ceased to 'hide themselves or ... turn tail as used to be their custom'. Instead they 'made their sojourn [in enemy territory] as if they were in their own country' and, with good courage, 'all advanced keenly against the enemy ... with all their might destroying utterly the Agarenes'.⁷⁷ This offers, albeit in caricature, an outline of the guerrilla tactics long employed against Muslim raiders in contrast with the new offensive stance. The chronicle credits the change to Nikephoros Phokas, who succeeded his father Bardas as Domestic of the Schools in, probably, 955. This is a simplification, in that 'dogging and pouncing' remained an option in resisting Hamdanid raids, while Byzantine expeditions had long been harrying Cilicia and Mesopotamia. But it registers awareness that significant change took place during the 950s.

Constantine VII sought to present himself as *au courant* with the new tactics and to demonstrate the value of imperial wisdom, gained from the writings of ancient tacticians. Several codices containing collections of classical tactical works were written at his initiative or in the ambit of his court.⁷⁸ Already, in a speech composed for distribution in 950, he declared his desire to go forth on campaign himself,⁷⁹ and the compilation of the *Treatise on Imperial Expeditions* is an earnest indication of his intention to lead from the front. It was probably re-edited and made ready for practical application in the mid-950s.⁸⁰ But in the event Constantine stayed in his capital and Sayf showed himself still able to run rings round Byzantine defence forces. In the spring of 956, he swept through the area of Anzitene and led a separate expedition as far as Charsianon later the same year. Facing repeated reverses in what had developed into a kind of duel with 'the wicked and impious Hamda[nid]',⁸¹ Constantine resorted to various ceremonial devices to conjure up an aura of success. Hence the reception at Constantinople of a relic, the hand of John the Baptist, abducted from Muslim-held Antioch;⁸² the triumph celebrated after what seems to have been a quite minor naval battle;⁸³ and, most spectacularly, the act of ritual trampling

⁷⁶ McGeer, *Dragon's Teeth*, 184–8, 259, 261–4, 272–5, 283–8; Haldon, *Warfare*, 218–20, 222.

⁷⁷ Theoph. Cont. VI.41, 459–60.

⁷⁸ C.M. Mazzucchi, 'Dagli anni di Basilio Parakimomenos (Cod. Ambr. B 119 Sup.)', *Aevum* 52 (1978), 281.

⁷⁹ H. Ahrweiler, 'Un discours inédit de Constantin VII Porphyrogénète', *TM* 2 (1967), 399; Mazzucchi, 'Basilio', 298 and n. 95.

⁸⁰ Constantine VII, *Three Treatises*, 51–3 and n. 35 (introduction).

⁸¹ Darrouzès, *Epistoliers*, 146.

⁸² Skylitzes, 245.

⁸³ Theoph. Cont. VI.29, 453; M. McCormick, *Eternal Victory* (Cambridge, 1986), 165–6.

upon Sayf's cousin Abu'l 'Asha'ir which Constantine performed before crowds in the Forum of Constantine in 956, a public humbling with clear overtones of ancient Roman glories and continuity from the first Constantine.⁸⁴

There was, as Michael McCormick noted,⁸⁵ a strong element of illusion and morale-boosting behind these ceremonies. Constantine had staked his prestige on putting an end to Sayf ad-Daula's depredations, and yet the raids went on. He therefore paraded through Constantinople such symbols of victory as he could muster and demonstrated that he could still attract powerful new relics for its protection. His overall strategy was still essentially one of 'containment' rather than acquisition of territory beyond the Taurus or Anti-Taurus. Thus in the summer of 957 the Byzantines succeeded in sacking the fortress of Hadat, destroying the fortifications and allowing the citizens safe conduct to Aleppo. They seem then to have withdrawn without attempting to occupy the position permanently.⁸⁶ Seemingly, they were trying to create a kind of demilitarised zone to the south of the Anti-Taurus. Nonetheless, given the scale and great expense of the military build-up as well as the impact which the *kataphrakts* seem to have had on Muslim formations, Byzantine counter-measures against Sayf might be expected to have become bolder. It could be that leading army families such as the Phokades, who had suffered casualties in the campaigning, were eager to mount longer-range offensives against Sayf.⁸⁷ But there is no reason to doubt the indication of an Arabic source that the decision to raise the stakes – to take the road to Aleppo – was made by Constantine himself, as a last resort. According to a commentary on a poem by Abu Firas, after enduring incessant raids and having had truce proposals countered with unheard-of demands, the emperor made peace agreements with the rulers of neighbouring peoples and raised a huge army to send against Sayf.⁸⁸ This was the army directed against Samosata in 958 which, in contrast with previous expeditions, occupied the town and maintained it. I suggest that a decision had now been taken to deliver a knock-out blow against Sayf, striking at his seat of authority, Aleppo, where an elaborate palace had been built. Samosata was seen as an important forward base for this purpose, protruding into the Hamdanid domain, yet having communications along the Euphrates

⁸⁴ Skylitzes, 241; McCormick, *Eternal Victory*, 159–63.

⁸⁵ McCormick, *Eternal Victory*, 159–60, 188.

⁸⁶ Vasiliev, *Byzance et les Arabes* II/2, 97–8 (Yahya of Antioch); Vasiliev, *Byzance et les Arabes* II/1, 361.

⁸⁷ On the Phokas family's leading role in warfare against Sayf, see J.-Cl. Cheynet's appendix, 'Les Phocas', in *Le traité sur la guérilla (De velitatione) de l'empereur Nicéphore Phocas* (963–969), eds. G. Dagron, H. Mihăescu (Paris, 1986), 298–306, 315.

⁸⁸ Vasiliev, *Byzance et les Arabes*, II/2, 368 (Ibn Halawaih).

valley with Byzantine forts in the region of Anzitene and with Melitene.⁸⁹ Constantine may not have intended the permanent occupation of Samosata or the other towns that were seized during the drive towards Aleppo. The focus was on Aleppo, or rather on shattering Sayf's reputation as its ruler and protector.

The Byzantines' eventual capture of Aleppo in 962 did strike a blow at Sayf's prestige from which it never fully recovered. Although their occupation was brief, the palace was sacked and much of the town burnt; several sections of the walls had been destroyed during the siege.⁹⁰ But by 962 the emperor who had launched the drive against Sayf was dead, and the military juggernaut directed at Aleppo had acquired a momentum of its own and prestige and political power for its field-commanders. Constantine's choice of the *parakoimomenos*, Basil, to command the assault on Samosata suggests that considerations of political security were ever-present, for all his anxiety to deal Sayf's power base an irreparable blow.⁹¹ He was signalling his intention to lead operations himself shortly before he fell ill and died, in the autumn of 959.⁹² It is doubtful whether Constantine's ambitions in the late 950s were any more intent on acquiring territory in Mesopotamia or Syria than they had previously been. He was using massive armed retaliation as a last resort, after the failure of repeated attempts to make truces or divert Sayf from raiding, and his prime concern seems to have been to restore a degree of order and security on the eastern approaches. However, the inhibitions on full exploitation of the empire's mounting material and demographic resources for military organisation had been lifted, and what began as a kind of punitive operation turned into a drive for outright annexation of towns and territories in the Middle Euphrates basin and, subsequently, Cilicia. Under a reluctant, diplomacy-loving emperor, new forces of expansionism were released in directions which he probably never intended.⁹³

⁸⁹ Theoph. Cont., VI.44, 461; Canard, *Ha'mdanides*, 794–5 and n. 166; Vasiliev, *Byzance et les Arabes* II/1, 363; Oikonomides, 'L'organisation', 289; Hild, Restle, *Kappadokien*, 125–6.

⁹⁰ Canard, *Ha'mdanides*, 657–8, 814.

⁹¹ Theoph. Cont., VI.44, 461; Mazzucchi, 'Basilio', 299; Whittow, *Orthodox Byzantium*, 346.

⁹² Skylitzes, 247.

⁹³ Such a scenario is compatible with, and may even be corroborated by, the likelihood that Byzantine emperors, upon gaining mastery over Muslim regions from Melitene southwards, inclined to leave existing administrative structures intact and to employ locally born officials. This would be all the more understandable if Byzantine decision-makers had not, in the mid-tenth century, envisaged extensive conquests and lacked the ambition or personnel to take over the administrative burdens that permanent occupation, disparate populations and new funding commitments would entail: see Holmes' chapter in this volume.